

CHANGES IN THE FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MAKE MORE LEGAL IMMIGRANTS ELIGIBLE FOR BENEFITS

Michigan Family Independence Agency

I am not a United States Citizen. Can I get food assistance?

You may be eligible now if you are a legal permanent resident and if you, your spouse, or your parents have a record of working in the United States. Your local Family Independence Agency Office will be able to help determine if you have worked the required amount of time. People who came to the United States as refugees and some types of immigrants are eligible. You may also be eligible if you were living legally in the United States on August 22, 1996 and (1) you were age 65 at that time, or (2) you are now receiving disability payments, or (3) you are now under the age of 18.

What changes were made?

On May 13, 2002, President Bush signed a law - the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 - that will allow more low-income non-citizens and legal immigrants to receive food assistance benefits if they meet the Food Assistance Program's income requirements.

When does the new law go into effect?

Some legal immigrants affected by the 2002 law became eligible to receive food assistance benefits on October 1, 2002 but most will not be eligible until later. The information below explains more about eligibility.

- The new law allows eligibility for legal immigrants who meet the program's requirements AND meet at least one of the following conditions:
 - Are receiving disability benefits such as SSI or disability-related Medicaid. Eligibility for this group started October 1, 2002.
 - Have lived in the United States for 5 years in a qualified status. Eligibility for this group starts April 1, 2003.
 - Are under 18 years old and entered the United States after August 22, 1996. Eligibility for this group starts October 1, 2003.

Which immigrants are in a qualified status?

Qualified immigrants include lawful permanent residents (holders of green cards), refugees, asylees, (persons granted asylum) people granted withholding of deportation or removal, Cuban/Haitian entrants, individuals who have received INS (Immigration and Naturalization Services) parole in the United States for at least one year, conditional entrants, and certain victims of domestic violence.

Does the law change the rules for immigrants who are already eligible?

No. Everyone who was eligible before continues to be eligible now.

Does the law change rules for immigrants who are in the country for humanitarian reasons?

Yes. As a result of the 2002 law, there will no longer be a seven-year limit on food assistance benefits for refugees, asylees, Amerasians and Cuban or Haitian entrants. Beginning on April 1, 2003, these non-citizens will be eligible as long as they qualify for the program based on income.

How can I apply or learn more?

To get food assistance benefits you have to file an application at your local FIA office. To get more information, please call your local FIA office or visit us online at www.michigan.gov/fia.

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